

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

FEBRUARY 2000

ONE DOLLAR





Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr

Later in this issue, noted outdoor writer Bob Gooch provides a look back at the history and organization of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Entitled "From Humble Beginnings," Bob has presented a very thorough historical perspective of our agency. As I read Bob's article and reflected on the nearly 84 years of history about the Department, I felt an upwelling of pride about what this agency has accomplished over the years. Coupled with that pride was a sincere respect for those resource professionals who have played such an important part in the stewardship of our fish and wildlife populations. We must never lose sight of how much we owe to those individuals for their dedication and commitment to our natural world.

Recently, we were asked to prepare a mentor letter for a national organization that is developing a children's web site about wildlife. This technology will reach out to our nation's youth regarding the diverse opportunities found within the conservation field. We started our letter by asking if the reader knew that Virginia currently has a population of white-tailed deer that numbers almost 1 million ani-

mals, but that about a hundred years ago, we only had a couple of thousand deer in the state. We went on to ask if the reader knew that Smith Mountain Lake, near Roanoke, is known nationally for its striped bass fishing, or if they knew that this magazine will soon be nearly 70 years old. Our reason for asking these questions was because these success stories, and many others in Virginia, are due to the people who have chosen a career in wildlife conservation and management. As you can see from Bob's article, there has always been something very special about the men and women who have selected a career in the wildlife field. That something special is their love of the outdoors, their deep respect for our wildlife and other natural resources, and their dedication to leaving the world a little bit better than they found it.

Throughout the history of the Department, it has been recognized that our wildlife and natural resources do not belong to any of us. We are only borrowing them from the next generation, and when we borrow something we must make sure that we return it in as good or better condition than when we borrowed it. That philosophy is at the heart of



Lee Walker

a career in the conservation professions, and it is certainly how "Mac" Hart, Major A. Willis Robertson, "Tibbs" Clarke and so many others left their mark on the Department.

It is often said that you have to know where you've been before you can know where you're going. We sincerely hope you enjoy the look back at our agency's history, for it certainly sets the stage for us to embark on a new century of opportunities and challenges on behalf of our wildlife resources. And it's these resources that we've only borrowed from the next generation.

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.

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The importance of printing a magazine like Virginia Wildlife was recognized early in the history of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and for over 60 years it has been educating people about Virginia's wildlife resources.

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

Cover: Game Warden Thomas McElroy, giving a wildlife presentation to preschoolers in Stanardsville, Virginia, is just one of the many dedicated and hard working professionals from the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Photo by Dwight Dyke.
Back Cover: Barred owl photo ©Scotty Lovett.

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Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

From Humbl



e Beginnings

by Bob Gooch

A look back at the history and organization of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

A government agency at any level: federal, state, or local, usually arises to address a public need, one that cannot, or does not get the proper attention in the private sector. Typically that need has been evident for sometime, and the idea gets kicked around on the street, at civic clubs, in the halls of government, and at other gatherings of concerned citizens. Invariably it becomes a highly controversial subject—particularly by the time it comes before a legislative body which has the authority to establish a government agency.

The eventual establishment of such an agency does not come easily—nor quickly. It sometimes takes years. Even then another extended period of time may elapse before the new agency is staffed and its people come to grips with its mission—even though that mission has been well thought out and recognized for years.

That was generally the long trail that eventually led to the creation of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Though the need for such an agency was not realized until several centuries later, it was rather firmly established when Captain John Smith first stepped ashore on the spongy soil of Jamestown Island back in 1607. The good Captain brought with him an entirely different philosophy toward wildlife and other natural resources, one far different from that practiced by the Indians or Native Americans for many centuries.

The Indians were the original conservationists in what is now



Known as the "father of the Game Commission," the late M. D. "Mac" Hart was appointed to oversee the newly formed agency.

America. They looked to the land and its animals for their very existence, respecting the vast natural resources, and taking only what they could use. The white-tailed deer is a good example. It may not have been as abundant back there in 1607, but

Despite their efforts, the unchecked exploitation of the land eventually began to take its toll. There were no regulations regarding the killing of wildlife for food and other uses. No seasons and no limits on the number of animals a successful hunter could

striped bass—the most successful hunters and fishermen. The men of the wilderness, the Daniel Boones and the Davy Crocketts of later years.

White-tailed deer populations, that were abundant early in the 17th



Over the last 80 years, the establishment of hunting and fishing regulations, along with sound wildlife management practices, has helped to insure stable populations of many species in Virginia, like the white-tailed deer.

there were plenty of animals to provide for the Indian populations. Various estimates place deer populations at less than a half million animals in the area that is now the Old Dominion. Today the Virginia deer population is pushing the one million mark.

Captain John Smith and those early settlers who followed him, however, were exploiters, seeking material wealth from what appeared to be a new land of abundance and opportunity. Their goal was to clear the land of “wild beasts” that threatened them and their families, clear the forests and drain the swamps for sprawling plantations, build roads through the wilderness, establish cities, and make their fortunes shipping furs, timber, and other seemingly unlimited natural resources back to the Old Country. That many were successful is well recorded in history.

The Indians were unable to turn back this assault on their native land and the resources they treasured.



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The black bear is the largest mammal in Virginia, and continues to thrive throughout many parts of the state. Wildlife biologists are currently in the sixth year of a 10-year study of bears, and are learning more about bear behavior and their populations.

take. Living off the land was an accepted way of life with little thought given to the future of those resources. The early heroes were those who could outwit the wiliest white-tailed buck or land the largest

century, began to decline. Of all of the early animals, including elk, the deer was probably the hardest hunted by both the Indians and early settlers. A sharp decline in deer numbers was noted as early as 1699, less than a hundred years after Captain John Smith landed on our shores, and the first attempt at wildlife management surfaced. Serious hunters apparently became alarmed and they prevailed upon the colonial leg-

islative body to pass a law which prohibited hunting deer between February and July. Though crude, it was a step in the right direction.

But despite that move toward wildlife management, the deer populations continued to decline. Other

attempts at game management followed, but lacking sound management techniques, and little or no law enforcement, they apparently had little effect. During the 1920s the deer kill in Virginia was less than 800 animals per year, and by the 1930s the total population was less than 25,000 animals.

Of all of Virginia's rich variety of game animals none probably had as much influence on the movement toward modern game management and the eventual creation of what is now the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries as the deer. Nor has any animal prospered more under the watchful eye of the Department

than that same white-tailed deer. The return of its numbers has been spectacular—from less than a half-million in 1607, down to 25,000 in the 1930s, but up to almost a million as the 20th century came to a close. Though the deer populations were dangerously low by the turn of the previous century, their growth since has been highly rewarding. The fortunes of the white-tailed deer look bright indeed as we enter the 21st century. What a difference a single century, and modern wildlife management, have made.

A half century before the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries came into being, sportsmen, those who hunted and fished for recreation instead of subsistence, were spearheading the conservation movement. Aided by new publications, such as *American Sportsman*, *Forest and Stream*, and *Field and Stream*, which provided a means of communication, the new breed of anglers and hunters were advocating proper etiquette in the field, giving game a sporting chance, and a commitment to the perpetuation of the wildlife that supported their form of healthy out-



One of the first wildlife management programs started by the Department in its early years was to try and restore dwindling deer populations. With a lot of hard work and persistence their numbers have grown from a low of 25,000 in the 1930s, to almost a million by the end of 1999.



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door recreation. One thing that this small, but growing, group of early conservationists correctly recognized was that the regularly constituted legislative bodies were unable to cope with the complex problems of wildlife and fisheries management.

The early successes of wildlife agencies in a number of northeastern states gave support to the growing desire for the establishment of a like agency in Virginia, but a more substantial impetus arose from the establishment in 1907 of a highly successful Game Department in Alabama. It's interesting to note that a number of years later an early board of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries turned to Alabama for professional wildlife manager, I. T. Quinn, to lead its professional staff.

As early as 1898 the Virginia Division of the League of American Sportsmen drafted a bill for the uniform opening of hunting seasons, but it was 1902 before the bill became the law. Subsequent sessions of the General Assembly added other protective features and many counties enacted local ordinances in attempts to protect fish and game. Despite these well-intentioned efforts, game populations continued to decline—primarily because of the inadequacy of law enforcement and the absence of wise management practices.

A bill patterned closely after the Alabama bill was drawn up by the Virginia Audubon Society and presented to the General Assembly in 1912, but it failed. Presented again in 1914, it suffered the same fate. The unsuccessful bill would have created a state agency to manage the wildlife resources of the Commonwealth.

Fortunately, under the leadership of the Farmers Institute and the Farmers Union, the bill was presented again two years later and the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, as we know it today, came into being on June 17, 1916. Its creation was the result of the hunters and fishermen of Virginia prevailing upon the General Assembly to create a special agency to protect the game and freshwater fisheries of the Commonwealth. Later the name was changed to the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries, and more recently back to the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Originally it was set up under a commissioner who, as executive head, was also chief of the Commission of Fisheries. He in turn appointed a secretary. The late M. D. "Mac" Hart

was appointed to that position. He is credited with seeing the Department through those first trying years, and is today known as the "father of the Game Commission." He remained devoted to the agency and the cause of conservation until his death in 1950.

According to the first annual report of the new Department of Game and Inland Fisheries "its first office was opened in the cloak room of the Senate Chamber of the Capitol." It was maintained by a chief clerk, an assistant clerk, and a stenographer. The report adds "the act creating this department appropriated no money for its support, and provided that all its expenses should be paid out of the receipts from hunting licenses." Ironically, neither hunting nor fishing licenses were required or available at the time the department was established. It is also worth noting that even now, in the dawn of the 21st century, little money from the general revenue taxes is appropriated to support the Department.

The year 1926 was a good one for the Department, for it was on March 24, 1926, that the Governor signed into law a new bill which divorced it from the old Fisheries Commission, a move which came only after much stormy debate in the General Assembly.



In 1926 the General Assembly elected to give the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries a board to govern its own affairs. Major A. Willis Robertson (center) was appointed the Department's first chairman. He would later become a state senator from Virginia, and co-author of the Pittman-Robertson Act, which continues to create needed funding for fish and wildlife agencies across the country.

The Department was now on its own with new freedom to flex its muscles. It was also decided at that time that a group of Commission members, appointed by the Governor, would administer the affairs of the Department. The first meeting of the new organization was held in Richmond on July 30, 1926. Major A. Willis Robertson, later famous as a co-author of the Pittman-Robertson Act and a Senator from Virginia, was the first chairman, of the agency. The chairman, was the administrative head of the organization with the authority and responsibility to appoint a secretary and assemble a staff to handle the clerical work and other duties of the Commission. The chairmanship under that arrangement was a full-time job. Robertson resigned in 1933 to run for Congress and the late Carl H. Nolting of Louisa County was appointed to the chairmanship. In the meantime the name "Department" had been dropped in favor of Commission. For a number of years the agency operated as the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries, but the original name Department of Game and Inland Fisheries was adopted again on July 1, 1987. It operates under that name today.

Writing in the February 1929 issue of the *Game and Fish Conservationist* published by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, M. B. Mount set the tone behind the thinking which created the then fledgling agency, and laid before the Commis-



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Placing bands with identification numbers on wildlife has long been used to assist biologists in studying the movement of many species, like this Canada goose.

sion its task ahead. "It is said by those who are supposed to know that this country, when it was first settled by Europeans, contained wildlife in greater variety and greater abundance than was to be found in any other portion of the world. No one of the present generation can form an adequate conception of the amount of game that once swarmed over what is now the United States. Of the countless millions of wild passenger pigeons there is today not a single survivor. Outside of a few small herds closely guarded in sanctuaries there are no buffalo. The beaver, one of the most valuable of all fur-bearing animals, is virtually extinct. The wood duck, the Labrador duck, the snowy egret, the

From nearly being extirpated from Virginia in the early part of the century, wild turkey populations have rebounded to all time highs, and is considered by many one of the Department's greatest wildlife management success stories.



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plains antelope and other valuable and interesting species are either extinct or practically so.

By what right have we of this generation been deprived of the privilege of knowing and enjoying these birds and beasts with which Nature so bountifully endowed North America? ...Must we conclude that the sportsmen of Virginia are satisfied with present conditions?"

Mount, obviously far ahead of his time in his thinking, spoke of restrictive conservation, game laws and their enforcement, but also of constructive conservation, providing of adequate food and cover for wildlife. A Lynchburg resident and a member of the Lynchburg Chapter of the Izaak Walton League, Mr. Mount pretty much laid before the Commission its challenge and the corrective actions it should take.

Despite the stock market crash of 1929, which threw Virginia and the

Radio telemetry, the use of an electronic signal to track fish and wildlife, has greatly aided biologists in their research and study of many species of animals, birds, and reptiles.

rest of America into a deep depression that lasted until World War II, the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries grew to maturity during the period from 1930 to 1940. Thanks to regulated hunting and good law enforcement, freedom from disease, and protection from forest fires, there were gratifying increases in both grouse and turkey populations. The first beavers were released on the Big Levels Game Refuge in Augusta County, the valuable fur bearer having been extirpated in Virginia for many years. This marked the beginning of a program to return the beaver to its former habitat.

The World War II year of 1942 was a landmark one for the Commission, when on July 1, it was revamped by a legislative act. The old

commissioners went out of office, and new commissioners were appointed by the Governor—one from each of the then nine Congressional districts. The Commission, under the provisions of the reorganization act, was empowered to choose its own executive director.

To select its first executive director the Commissioners went outside of the agency and chose Talbot "Tibbs" Clarke, a wildlife specialist with the George Washington National Forest. Clarke served in that capacity until August of 1946. As the new executive director he was charged with selecting a professional staff and overseeing it, responsible, of course, to the nine Commissioners. The Commissioners generally limited themselves to setting policy and listening to the thoughts and desires of their constituents, usually at public hearings. That is the manner in which the current De-




*Educating landowners and the citizens of Virginia on how to help wildlife is a big part of the important work being done by the Department.
Photo by Dwight Dyke.*



*Wildlife biologists are currently working on an intensive study to help restore dwindling populations of bobwhite quail in Virginia. Photo by Dwight Dyke.
Bobwhite quail photo ©Scotty Lovett.*



A photograph of two quail in a natural setting. The quail in the foreground is standing on a dark, textured surface, possibly a log or branch, and is facing right. It has a brown and white speckled pattern on its body and a distinctive white stripe through its eye. The quail in the background is also facing right and has similar plumage. The background is filled with dry, brown branches and leaves, creating a natural, somewhat blurred environment.

partment of Game and Inland Fisheries functions, a method that has proved productive over the years.

With Clarke's resignation after a four-year stint, the Commissioners again went outside of the agency and brought on I. T. Quinn, a former commissioner of the Alabama Conservation Department, to serve as Clarke's replacement. Quinn took office in September, 1946, immediately after World War II when the agency, stripped to its bones during the war as staff members headed off to serve their country, was pumping up to resume an aggressive wildlife management program.

With Quinn's retirement on June 30, 1958, the Commissioners turned to their own ranks and moved Chester F. Phelps up from his post as game division chief to executive director. Phelps' background and training included forestry as well as wildlife management. He was among the first graduates of the wildlife management school at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Richard "Dick" H. Cross was moved into Phelps' old post as game division chief—and would later become executive director himself.

Phelps' tour, kicking off on June 30, 1958, spanned 20 years. He retired in 1978. The Chester F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area in Culpeper and Fauquier counties honors him.

Upon Phelps' retirement the Commissioners again looked to its own ranks for his replacement. The choice was an easy one. James "Jim" F. McInteer, Jr., who had joined the agency just before World War





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Fisheries biologists regularly survey the many lakes, rivers, and streams in Virginia to help manage for optimum populations of many fish species. Electrofishing (above) allows biologists to capture, weigh, and measure fish, and then release them unharmed. The Department's trout stocking program (below) has been highly successful throughout the years. In 1999 an estimated 1,250,000 rainbow, brown, and brook trout were stocked in streams and lakes across Virginia.



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In 1999 the Department completed construction of the state of the art Vic Thomas Hatchery in Brookneal, Virginia. It will be used primarily for batching and rearing striped bass.

II, but served 20 years as a Marine Corps officer, retired from the military and then returned to the agency—first as chief of the information and education division and then as deputy executive director. Capable and well regarded, he was a natural choice. He served three years, retiring from the agency in 1981.

With McInteer's departure Richard H. "Dick" Cross, who had moved up to deputy executive director under McInteer, was appointed executive director. Cross was a true professional wildlife manager, having moved through the ranks from the game division where he served many years as its chief. Like McInteer, Cross had begun his career with the Commission prior to World War II and had it interrupted while he served as a fighter pilot in the skies over Europe during the conflict. Dick Cross retired from the Commission in 1987 and later the



Another major milestone in fisheries management was the completion of the Bosher's Dam fish ladder on the James River in the spring of 1999. This will now allow anadromous fish species, like shad and berring, to swim further upriver on their annual spring spawning runs. Photos by Lee Walker.

Elm Hill Wildlife Management Area was renamed after him. It is now known as the Dick Cross Wildlife Management Area, a favorite spot for field trials, long one of Cross's favorite outdoor pursuits.

Upon Cross' retirement the board went outside again for a new executive director. This time James "Jim" A. Remington, a highly successful business executive, was tapped for the job. Unlike Dick Cross, who brought years of professional wildlife management experience to the job, Jim Remington brought executive and administrative abilities. He took a quick look at the operating

budget and immediately saw the need for an increase in fishing and hunting license fees. These fees had remained much the same for a period of years while operating costs had been skyrocketing with the inflation of the 1980s. He retired in 1990.

Upon Remington's return to private life, the board of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries went outside again, but this time un-

No matter where you travel in the state to wet a line, one thing's for sure, the fishing couldn't be better.

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE





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Anyone who spends a great deal of time in the outdoors will quickly learn that game wardens are devoted to upholding Virginia's wildlife laws, protecting its citizens, and watching over our wildlife resources.

covered a professional wildlife manager in Buddy "Bud" Dale Bristow of Arizona. Bristow, a wildlife management graduate of Oklahoma State University, had recently retired as director of the Arizona Game and Fish Department and was working in wildlife management under contract with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Bristow's tour as executive director was also brief. He retired again in 1993 having served since 1990.

William "Bill" L. Woodfin, Jr. was brought to the office in June of 1994. He was already in public service with the Department of Environmental Quality. Woodfin brought

degrees in environmental engineering and chemistry to the position, education and training in public administration, a background that has proved highly valuable in the administration of the agency. Woodfin seems destined to lead the agency well into the 21st century.

While the executive directors have brought a wide range of backgrounds to their position, wildlife and fisheries professionals have headed the wildlife and fisheries divisions.

The first chief of the fisheries divi-

sion was Gay W. Buller, who was brought down from Pennsylvania. The Buller Fish Cultural Station in Marion was later named for him. Upon his retirement Mr. Buller was replaced by Robert "Bob" G. Martin, who later resigned to join the American Sportfishing Association in Alexandria. It was during Martin's tenure that the program of providing hunting and fishing access to the major rivers was initiated. Next came Jack M. Hoffman who served the agency well for many years. Upon Hoffman's retirement David

K. Whitehurst was moved up from the ranks of the division. Gary F. Martel, a native of New York, assumed the position of chief of the fisheries division and currently serves the Department in that capacity. He too came up through the ranks.

Charles O. Handley was employed as superintendent of game early in Major Robertson's administration. He was later replaced by Chester F. Phelps, who under the reorganization in 1942, became the first chief of the wildlife division. Phelps was promoted to executive director in 1958, and Dick Cross, a veteran wildlife manager with the Department, was moved up to chief of the division.

Cross, like Phelps, assumed the post of executive director when Jim McInteer retired in 1981 and Jack W. Raybourne, then regional wildlife manager in the Verona office, was moved to Richmond to assume the post of chief of the wildlife division. Raybourne was assigned other duties in the Department in 1990, and was replaced by Robert "Bob" W. Duncan also up from the ranks. He currently heads the wildlife division.

Law enforcement was an early priority of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. A game warden system was established during the first decade of the Department's existence and expanded considerably after the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries was formed in 1926. A game warden system was then established for each county and in each first-class city in the state. Additionally 10 supervising wardens were authorized as were 10 additional "floating" wardens who could be stationed where most needed. "Most of the funds and attention of the Commission were directed toward law enforcement in the early days," Bud Bristow noted recently. "The Pittman-Robertson Act, passed by Congress in 1937, dictated, however, that the funds so produced were to be used specifically for wildlife management, not law enforcement," he added.

In 1950 supervising game warden M. Wheeler Kesterson was brought into the Richmond office to become the first chief of law enforcement. Today a well-trained and expanded game warden force is headed by Colonel Jeff Uerz who was lured south from the State University of New York. Currently he heads a law enforcement force that includes two assistant chiefs who hold the rank of major, five regional managers or captains, over a dozen warden lieutenants, over two dozen sergeants, and approximately 125 local wardens. These professional wardens are thoroughly trained in all phases of modern law enforcement practices.

The early efforts of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries were sparked more by enthusiasm and interest than by sound management practices. Modern wildlife practices that are widely accepted today simply were not available to those who guided the Department



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Wardens are skilled law enforcement officers and continue their training on a regular basis. Learning how to handle difficult situations is an important part of their job.

as it all but stumbled through the early years. Between its humble beginning in 1916 and its reorganization in 1926 the game warden system was established. Early efforts were directed more toward the en-



The Windsor Shades Game Farm was established to produce approximately 3,000 quail, several hundred turkeys, Mexican bobwhite quail, and several hundred Hungarian partridge annually. The game farm was eventually moved to Cumberland County, but it was many years before it was realized that hatchery-reared birds simply did not thrive in the wild. This was an early and ill-advised attempt at wildlife management that proved unsuccessful. As the science of wildlife management advanced it became evident that releasing exotic birds, such as Hungarian partridge, in a habitat for which they were not suited was a waste of effort. It also became evident that providing adequate natural cover and food for native species, such as quail and wild turkeys, was the road to success. Naive hatchery-reared birds simply do not survive in the wild irrespective of the quality of the habitat. A lesson learned by trial and error. The game farm was eventual-



Since the establishment of the Department, game wardens have played an important role in wildlife and fisheries management. They enforce wildlife laws that not only protect fish and animals, but also protect the ethical hunter and angler.



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forcement of laws than the actual management of fish and wildlife.

"The early history of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries parallels that of agencies throughout America," said Bristow.

From high-speed computers that allow for quick access of information, to small hand-held devices that record a person's alcohol level, game wardens are going high tech when it comes to enforcing the law.



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Over the years the popularity of boating in Virginia has grown to record numbers. As of July 1, 1999, the Department had registered 236,743 boats, and trained thousands of people in boating safety.

ly closed. Modern shooting preserve operators have also learned this the hard way. "Released birds just seem to disappear," said one successful operator.

An attempt to introduce the popular ring-necked pheasant to the state proved equally futile. The same was true of white-tailed deer produced on game farms.

The reintroduction of elk, a fine game animal that was once native to the state, enjoyed limited success.

During this same period fisheries management seemed limited to the establishment of a bass hatchery. Over the years bass, large and small-

mouth, introduced to suitable waters where they are not currently present, has proved an acceptable management tool for spreading the fishing opportunities for these popular fish. Released as fingerlings in suitable waters, they thrive and quickly grow to maturity.

Mac Hart and his limited staff are not to be criticized for the mistakes of the early years. After all, little in the way of sound wildlife management knowledge was available to them. Perhaps their greatest contribution was their ability to keep the flame going, one that had been little more than smoldering embers for years, the unrealized dream of a few serious conservationists and sportsmen in the early days of the 20th century. The funds from the sale of

hunting and fishing licenses were extremely limited. And fishing licenses didn't even exist when they first took office!

The bi-monthly publication *Game and Fish Conservation* was also started during this early period.

The reorganization of the Department in 1926 laid the groundwork for greater success.

Following the formation of the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries in 1926 the new organization built on and was able to expand the work initiated by Mac Hart and his small staff. *Game and Fish Conservation*, for example, was continued. A combined hunting, trapping, and fishing license was established in 1928 creating more funds for conservation work.



The Department is the largest provider of public access to the waters of the Commonwealth. Currently there are 213 boating access sites throughout the state.

It was during this period that the restoration of the white-tailed deer got off to a conspicuous start, a wildlife management undertaking that has enjoyed spectacular success. The policy of rearing deer on the game farm for release in suitable habitat was wisely abandoned and the early game managers began purchasing deer from out-of-state. Approximately 1,800 animals were purchased from states such as Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin and released for the most part in the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. Backed by sound

wildlife management policies, seasons and bag limits were adjusted to encourage the growth of the herds of imported deer as well as the native Virginia whitetail which lingered in pockets east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Bucks only hunting was common in early seasons.

Possibly the most significant development during this period was the passage of the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937. It provided for an 11 percent tax on guns and ammunition at the federal level for distribu-

tion to the states based on the number of licensed hunters. It provided 75 percent of the funds for approved wildlife management practices and the hiring of trained wildlife biologists.

Another major event of these depression years was the signing of a cooperative agreement between the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries and the U. S. Forest Service for joint wildlife management projects on the 1,500,000 acres of public land in the George Washington and



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Jefferson National Forests. This was the first such agreement in America.

Other initiatives included the introduction of beavers at suitable locations around the state and the reintroduction of elk in Botetourt and Giles counties. Trout hatcheries were built at Marion, Front Royal, and Stevensville, and the policy of stocking keeper-size brook, brown, and rainbow trout in designated trout waters was adopted, a program that has proved extremely popular among anglers.

The publication of *Virginia*

as for put-and-take trout fishing waters, or to introduce brood stock to land or water made suitable for native species by good management. A good example is the purchase of a new wildlife management area or the construction of a new fishing lake.

The passage in 1951 of the Dingell-Johnson Act by Congress did for fisheries management what the Pittman-Robertson Act did for wildlife management back in 1937. It levied a 10 percent excise tax on fishing tackle with the money col-



Over the years Virginia Wildlife magazine has been entertaining and educating millions of people about Virginia's wildlife resources.



Remember, our children are the next generation of hunters and anglers, who will carry on these cherished traditions. We must teach them well, and learn to share all the pleasures the outdoors has to offer.

Wildlife magazine, begun at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, was eventually taken over by the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries, and it has since become one of the leading wildlife agency magazines in America.

World War II slowed the work of the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries following the reorganization in 1942, but the post-war years proved fruitful ones as the Commission expanded its professional staff of fisheries and wildlife biologists. By the 1950s fish and wildlife management in Virginia and other states had begun to mature. For example, the stocking of fish and game was all but abandoned except in isolated cases, such



lected at the federal level and distributed to the states for fisheries management and research.

Land acquisition to assure Virginia hunters places to hunt was begun in earnest in 1957 with the purchase of land in Alleghany and Bath counties for the formation of the 18,500-acre Gathright Wildlife Management Area. Earlier in 1951 the Hog Island Waterfowl Management Area on the James River in Surry County was purchased to pro-

Programs like Hunter Education, Project WILD, Virginia Wildlife magazine and Television, Aquatic Education, and Boating Education are just a few of the ways the Department works to teach the public about the importance of sound wildlife management and safety in the outdoors.

vide public duck and goose hunting. And later the 5,000-acre Saxis Waterfowl Management Area in Accomack County was added. Today the system of 29 widely scattered wildlife management areas pro-

vides 180,000 acres of well-managed hunting land. Cooperative agreements with military installations and timber companies have added many more acres of hunting land, particularly in the eastern part of the state where public hunting land is scarce.

On the fishing front, the Dingell-Johnson Act provided additional funds to purchase land for access points and boat launching ramps on the major rivers and streams across the state. Those same funds also

Fishing Program are just a few of the fisheries success stories that combine to create additional opportunities for all those who hunt, fish, boat or enjoy Virginia's resources.

The years since World War

©Maslowski Photo

It have been good ones for the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and for the hunters, anglers, and trappers whom it serves. But, as we enter a new millennium a rapidly growing human population and spreading suburbia threatening to gobble up open land pose serious threats to a way of life. The challenges facing wildlife managers have never been greater. Fortunately, a strong and highly professional Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, well-staffed with experienced and well-trained wildlife and fisheries biologists supported by equally professional law enforcement personnel, appears prepared to meet these challenges. But it will need the whole-hearted support of all those whose interests it serves. They are the ultimate beneficiaries of the modern wildlife management programs of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. □

For over half a century Bob Gooch has witnessed and written about much of Virginia's outdoor heritage. He has been a long time friend of the Department and Virginia Wildlife magazine.

kicked off a program of purchasing or constructing fishing lakes statewide. Managed specifically for fishing, there is usually a lake convenient to anglers in every part of Virginia.

Another highly productive project has been the live trapping of turkeys, mostly from the Gathright Wildlife Management Area, and relocating them at carefully selected sites all over Virginia. The result has been a turkey population at the

From our nations' symbol, the America bald eagle, to little known species like freshwater mussels and the little brown bat, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is dedicated to preserving all wildlife in Virginia.

highest level since long before the turn of the 20th century. Under careful management Virginia's black bear population has also steadily increased. The amazing restoration and return of striped bass in Virginia's tidal waters and the Urban

©Tommy Thompson

©Joe McDonald

Virginia's Best



Crappie Fishing

by David Hart

Life is tough for an angler in Virginia in early spring. There are simply too many things to do. Both largemouth and smallmouth bass shake off their winter hunger strike and start to go on the prowl as they prepare for the upcoming spawn. Stripers, which have been active all winter, are also getting ready for their annual spawning ritual. Walleye are moving up rivers and into shallow water, and trout stocking activity is at its peak all over the state. What's a die-hard angler to do?

One thing that's sure to grab the attention of any man, woman or child with a passion for fishing is the abundance of crappie in waters throughout the state. These tasty fish thrive in Virginia's larger lakes, and dozens of smaller reservoirs have outstanding populations of crappie, as well. Finding a lake full of these fish isn't the hard part; it's deciding where to go. But, with so much public water scattered across the state, even that's not so difficult.

Typically, shorter nights and longer, warmer spring afternoons signal the beginning of a whirlwind season for crappie anglers. The urge to spawn drives the fish shallow, and obvious cover, like beaver lodges, fallen trees, and boat docks, are crappie magnets. Crappie and brush piles go hand-in-hand like wood ducks and beaver ponds.

Like most fish, however, crappie activity is dominated by water temperature. When the temperature dips into the low 50s or below, they bury themselves in brush piles and on points in anywhere from 10 to 30

Spring means crappie. The fish are moving into the shallows and finding enough to fill a stringer is sometimes as easy as putting a lure in the water.

feet of water. Finding them, and then convincing them to hit a jig or minnow, can be a chore. And when the water heats up into the upper 70s or higher, crappie retreat to cooler water in the same depth range.

That's why spring is the highlight of most crappie anglers' calendars. Find any likely-looking spot, drop a small shiner or jig rigged under a bobber next to it, and wait a few minutes. If the fish are there, they won't pass up your offering.

All of Virginia's largest impoundments have outstanding crappie populations. Buggs Island Reservoir is known nationwide as a superb crappie lake, and national crappie tournaments are held there every year. Lake Anna is a dynamite place, and Smith Mountain Lake is good, also. All three regularly surrender dozens of fish over two pounds.

Perhaps the best place in Virginia to find big crappie is Lake Chesdin, a 3100-acre reservoir near Petersburg. Four of the state's 10 biggest crappie



©David Hart

Brush piles, old beaver butts, and boat docks are great spots for finding crappie.

of 1997 were pulled from this lake, including a 3 lb. 7 oz. slab. Chesdin ranked third, behind Smith Mountain and Buggs Island, in the number of crappie registered with the Department's Angler Recognition Program. That's pretty impressive, considering it's a speck on the state map compared to the other two lakes.

10 oz. fish that was caught in April 1994 by Justin Elliot.

"I've seen lots of nice crappie from smaller farm ponds," noted Region V fisheries biologist John Odenkirk, "but the problem with crappie in smaller bodies of water is that they keep the other fish from realizing their full potential. They compete with both bass and bluegill

long, hard winter can keep the fish deep, but an early, warm spring can push them shallow as early as mid-March. That's why a thermometer is one of the most important tools any crappie fisherman has on his boat.

The benchmark for the start of the spawning cycle starts somewhere around 55 degrees. When the water climbs up towards the 60-degree



Smaller lakes, many of which are owned and managed by the Department, have great populations of crappie, as well. Lake Orange in Orange County, Bark Camp Lake in Scott County, Lake Frederick in Frederick County, Lake Burton in Pittsylvania County, and Briery Creek Lake in Prince Edward County all offer good crappie fishing opportunities.

Although biologists strongly recommend against stocking crappie in smaller ponds and lakes, many private pond owners do put them in. The largest crappie of 1997, a 3 lb. 9 oz., monster, was caught by Bassett resident Mike Weaver from a private pond. So was the state record, a 4 lb.

throughout their life cycle."

He added that Lake Orange, a 124-acre Department-owned lake in Orange County, is experiencing a tremendous surge in crappie growth. They tend to be cyclical, so crappie populations and average sizes fluctuate every few years.

"Orange has some of the best crappie I've seen in a long time," said Odenkirk. "Last fall, we netted lots of fish between 12 and 14 inches. It was phenomenal, but it won't be that way for much longer. I'd say this is the year to get the bigger fish."

So where do you begin?

Again, nothing dictates crappie activity as much as water temperature, and in spring that can vary. A

As spring arrives and water temperatures warm, crappie begin to school up and head for shallower water. Serious anglers know this is the time for locating those really big fish.

mark, start looking for beaver huts, fallen trees, boat docks, and other cover in shallower water. Water willow, that dark green vegetation that rings the shores of so many of Virginia's lakes, is also a great place to search for crappie. If the cover is close to a creek channel or deep water, that's even better. A quality depth finder or a good lake map will help pinpoint those locations, and that will save you valuable time.

If the water is still chilly, search out brush piles anywhere from 10 to

25 feet deep. Many Department-owned and other public lakes have fish attractors built by volunteers and Department personnel, and all of those submerged brush piles are marked with buoys.

Once you've found a likely-looking area, you have to narrow down your hunt and pinpoint the fish. Sometimes, they will be right next to



Many anglers prefer using live bait, like minnows, for locating schooling crappie. Once you have found them a good selection of small, colorful jigs may be all it takes to bring them in the boat.

©David Hart

that visible or sunken brush; sometimes they won't. Serious crappie anglers use three, four or even six rods each and will cover several different depths at a time. Crappie tend to travel in schools, so once you find one, you've probably found a bunch.

On the other hand, if you try a good-looking spot but come up empty, don't hesitate to move. Most crappie anglers use a run-and-gun approach: they hit as many locations as they can until they find a good concentration of fish. A brief stay at each area is all that is needed to determine if crappie are there.

Crappie also tend to school in similar sizes. Bigger fish travel with bigger fish, and smaller crappie tend to stay together. If you can't seem to catch a big crappie off a brush pile, they probably aren't there. Try fishing deeper water nearby, or pack up and find another area.

Lure selections vary as much as the anglers who use them. Some diehard crappie anglers swear by tube jigs, others prefer feather jigs and others wouldn't fish with any-

thing but live minnows. All of them work well, but without a doubt, live bait will outperform plastic and feathers just about all the time. A couple of dozen shiners can put a dent in your wallet, though, so many anglers simply stick to artificial lures.

Tube jigs, which are nothing more than one or two-inch long pieces of soft plastic, are great crappie lures. A pack of 20 costs a few dollars, and a dozen jig heads in two or three different sizes, along with a slip bobber or two, will round out your crappie-fishing arsenal. For less than \$20, you can have a few season's worth of crappie lures.

It's a good idea to pick up a couple of different colors because the best color changes as often as the weather. One day the fish want black and chartreuse jigs, the next day, they won't touch anything but white or pink. The best advice is to simply try different colors until you find the one the fish want on that day.

A good way to cut through the learning curve, however, is to simply visit a bait or tackle shop near your favorite lake and ask lots of questions. Nobody loves to talk fishin' more than the men and women who work in these small stores. And usually, no one knows more about the local lakes.

These prolific, tasty fish will be in

your favorite lake all year, but for the easiest, most consistent action, go now. Like the redbud and dogwood blossoms that come and go in a matter of a few weeks, the best crappie fishing won't last long. □

David Hart is an outdoor writer for *Journal Newspapers* in Northern Virginia.

Choosing the Right Tackle

Crappie aren't too fussy, so don't worry about using a heavy fishing line. In fact, many serious crappie anglers use 12-lb. test or heavier monofilament. Snags are an integral part of crappie fishing and that heavier line allows anglers to pull their lures out of the brush without breaking their line. That saves time and money.

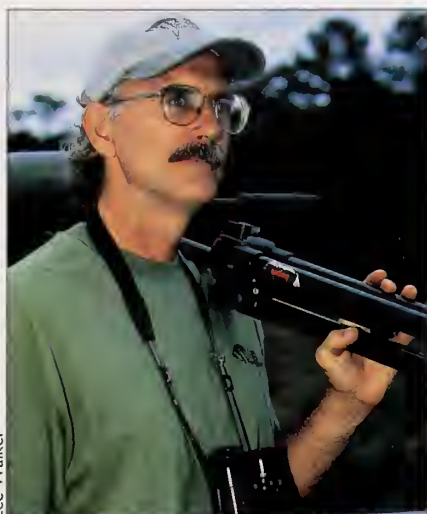
Any fishing rod and reel combination will do, but crappie don't get very big and they aren't the hardest fighters in the lake. Light action spinning rods increase the enjoyment of catching crappie.

For a complete list of Department-owned lakes, check out the *Public Fishing Lakes* book published by the Department. It's filled with detailed descriptions of lakes and the fish available in each. Send \$5 to *Public Fishing Lakes Book*, VDGIF, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. □



©Dwight Dyke

The Catbird



Lee Walker

Brian Taber is with the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, whose mission is to promote, conduct, and support research and public education centered on bird and insect migration on Virginia's Eastern Shore.

by Brian Taber

Everyone has favorite places. As a birder, mine are those where I can go to study birds, unbothered. Particularly interesting are places where I can sit or stand contentedly for hours, never moving more than a few yards. From there I can study the comings and goings of birds and the people who come to share the experience. They are places of advantage and opportunity, well-named for the catbird's habit of quietly studying his surroundings from a cozy and safe thicket. His "mewings" voice his opinions, but don't reveal too much. Several such places stand out from among many trips: The cliff face in the desolate Arizona desert; the balcony of the modest

lodge, with no electricity, in the remote Costa Rican rainforest; the boulder-piled mountain hawk watch; the ever-changing sandy point overlooking Diamond Shoals at Cape Hatteras and even my own yard.

But one spot that is both busy with birds and easily accessible is a current favorite, the high platform at the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge. The view there is nothing short of spectacular.

*catbird seat \ 'kat-berd seet \ n:
a position of great prominence,
advantage, benefit
or opportunity.*



©Dwight Dyke

©Maslowski Photo

Above: A special platform has been constructed in the heart of Kiptopeke State Park. Birders will find this an excellent location for spotting numerous species, like red-tailed hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*) **upper right** and tree swallows (*Trachycineta bicolor*) **right** who appear in great numbers as they migrate south each fall.

At more than 40 feet up, the view is over, not through, the trees. To the east are salt marshes. Past them is the Atlantic, only a mile away, seen between the southern tip of Smith

Seat



Lee Walker



©Dwight Dyke



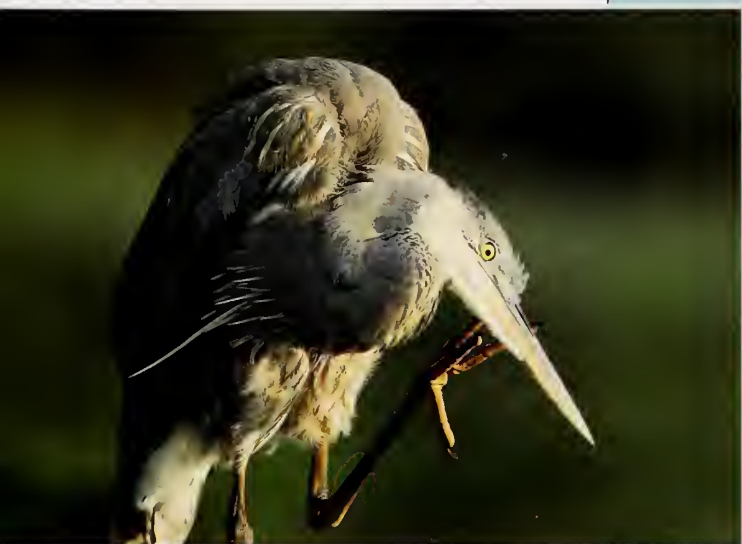
© Joe McDonald

Island and the northern tip of Fishermans Island, the most southerly of Virginia's barrier islands. To the south, over maritime forests of hardwood and pines that are sprayed by the salty sea air, is Fishermans Inlet and then Fishermans Island. To the west is the forested shore of the Chesapeake Bay. To the north are open fields and a freshwater pond. Much of the Refuge's 725 acres are filled with a thick understory of honeysuckle, wild grape, and poison

Each year volunteers spend countless hours watching, counting, and recording important information about the birds and insects that stop to feed and rest along Virginia's Eastern Shore.

ivy. Scanning these vistas with binoculars and a scope covers several square miles with one sweep.

In 1998, I was lucky enough to be conducting a spring migrant bird census at this spot for the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory. The census is a listing of the number of migrant birds of each species seen.



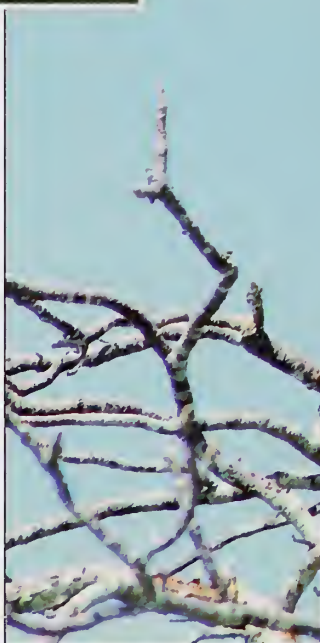
Above: Many birds, like the great blue heron, (*Ardea herodias*), can be seen year round. Photo ©Joe Mac Hudspeth Jr.

My 16 days there, in March, April, and May went by too quickly, though some days I spent more than 12 hours on the platform.

There was a lot of northward bird movement from before dawn to mid-morning on most days. The afternoons were generally slower, though there were some spectacular evening flights. The shorter, cooler March days produced some double-crested cormorants, ducks, geese, swans, blackbirds, and on one day, a tremendous flight of more than 18,000 yellow-rumped warblers, in a long, 10-hour string, heading for breeding grounds from New England to Alaska.

As the April days warmed and lengthened, herons, egrets, shorebirds, and hawks appeared from the south. At the same time, most of the sparrows that had wintered in the area departed. Brown pelican numbers increased, as did laughing gulls and common loons. More gulls and terns passed by, then the first brightly-colored warblers.

In May, there was more insect life in the air. Following this food source were more warblers, followed by flycatchers, orioles, cuckoos, tanagers, and many more that had survived the winter in Central or South



©Maslowski Photo

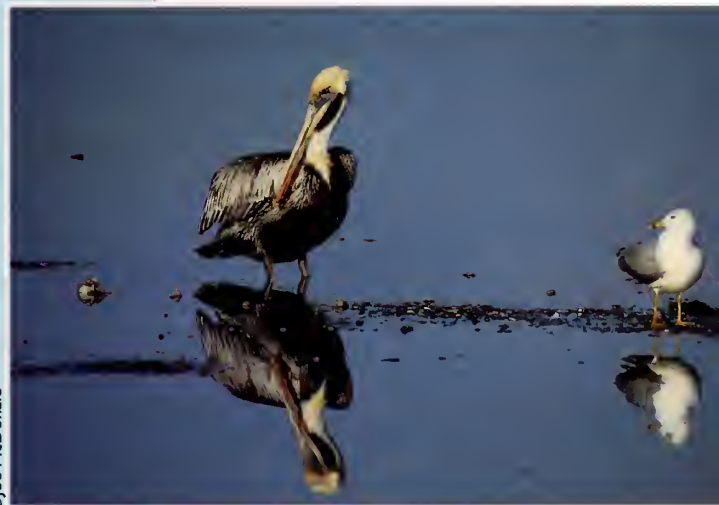
Above: The familiar osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) is a common sight along much of Virginia's tidal waters and is commonly referred to as the "fish hawk." **Right:** In stark difference from the majestic beauty and speed of the osprey, is the double-crested cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), who seems to be content while sitting patiently waiting for his next meal.



©Bill Lea



©Joe McDonald



can also monitor the health of birds and the environment which supports them. Conservation decisions can be based on such information. More studies are planned for this unique site, which sits at the junction of the sea and the Bay.

This widely diverse set of habitats, where landbirds and waterbirds converge in the spring, played host to 160 species of migrants and almost 50,000 birds during the census. Certainly many times that number passed by during migration but census observers weren't there enough days to see them. Among

Above: A newcomer to the lower part of Virginia's Eastern Shore is the brown pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*). They are graceful flyers, and can be seen gliding just inches above the surface of the water.

America or the Caribbean. The swallows and purple martins sped by. Within 15 minutes one morning, almost 7,000 double-crested cormorants paraded by just offshore. On one day, 80 species of migrants were recorded, the most for any census day. Some birds, such as common yellowthroats and prairie warblers, were beginning to defend nesting territories by singing in the same location day after day. Others, including ospreys and fish crows, were seen carrying nesting materials.

Being high up on the platform allowed me to see treetop birds from

the side and put me eyeball to eyeball a number of times with fast-moving falcons, swallows, and even huge northern gannets. It was an interesting vantage point, in contrast to the usual underside views.

The census was conducted because much of the Eastern Shore bird study has focused on the millions of birds, which funnel down the peninsula in the fall. We don't know as much about spring bird movement in the area. We do know that many migratory bird species are declining. Such studies, if carried out regularly, can provide early detection of population changes. They

the varieties were 10 species of herons, egrets and ibis; 15 species of ducks, geese and swans; 13 species of hawks, vultures and eagles; 16 species of shorebirds and 21 species of warblers. Oh, and of course, there tucked away in the lush undergrowth surrounding the platform were lots of gray catbirds. □

Brian Taber is an active member of the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory who's mission is to promote, conduct, and support research and public education centered on bird and insect migration on Virginia's Eastern Shore. If you would like more information on how you can get involved write: Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory, P.O. Box 111, Franktown, VA 23354.



Journal



Left to right: Carson Quarles, DGIF Board Chairman; Sherry Crumley, NWTF board member; Bob Strickley, Bob Atkinson, Michael Hutcheson, and Dennis Campbell, Virginia Chapter of the NWTF; William L. Woodfin Jr., Director, DGIF and Bob Duncan, Wildlife Division Director.

Virginia State Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation Donates Land to DGIF

by Julia Dixon Smith,
Media Relations Coordinator

At the winter meeting of the Board of Game and Inland Fisheries, the Virginia State Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) presented the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) with a facsimile check in the amount of \$47,000. The check represents the value of approximately 36 acres of land located adjacent to the Department's White Oak Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Pitt-

sylvania County. This property will be turned over to DGIF and will become a part of the WMA. Their gift will make the once privately held land open to the sportsmen and the sportswomen of Virginia.

When the presentation was made, Board Chairman Carson Quarles commented, "The National Wild Turkey Federation has been an outstanding partner of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. This organization has contributed much to the management of the state's wild turkey population."

Senior Regional Director of the NWTF Dennis Campbell observed, "Revenues raised by our volunteers through their chapter banquets throughout the state are used for numerous projects in Virginia. The Vir-

ginia State Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation is happy to work with the Department in any endeavor that will have a positive impact on wildlife habitat and, in this case, leave a legacy." Sherry Crumley, a NWTF board member; Bob Stickley, a Virginia chapter leader; Bob Atkinson, district leader; and Michael Hutcheson, Virginia Chapter president, joined Mr. Campbell in making the presentation to the DGIF Board.

The parcel of land, which had been purchased at auction by the Virginia Chapter of NWTF, contains cropland and woodland with road frontage along Route 706. The boundary line between this parcel and the White Oak WMA originally bisected a small fishing pond. With the donation of this property, the boundary line will be realigned bringing the pond under full Department management. In addition, the habitat on the tract is good for turkeys as well as a variety of wildlife species including deer, rabbit, quail, squirrel, and songbirds. Because of this donation, this property will be available for public enjoyment and long-term habitat protection. □

Virginia's Nongame Wildlife Fund Needs Your Help

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is responsible for the protection and conservation of all wildlife in Virginia, and we need your help to do our job. Help us fund critical research and management programs for the state's nongame and endangered species.

Support our Nongame Wildlife Fund, through our state tax checkoff program, and with your voluntary contributions.

As tax time approaches show how much you care by taking advantage of this wonderful opportunity to contribute to nongame wildlife management and conservation right here in Virginia. When you do this you are supporting all of Virginia's native birds, fish, and other nongame animals, that make Virginia's outdoor and wildlife resources unique.

If you are due a tax refund from the Commonwealth of Virginia you can take advantage of this opportunity. Simply mark you tax return in the appropriate place on the Virginia State Income Tax Form. If you would like to give directly to Virginia's Nongame Wildlife Fund please send your tax-deductible check (made payable to the Treasurer of Virginia) to: Virginia Nongame Fund, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. □

Write On Target

by Lee Watts
Information Services

In this column, we will help answer some of the most commonly asked questions that we receive from the public. If you have any questions relating to hunting, fishing, boating, regulations, access to Virginia's public lands and waters or anything concerning Virginia's wildlife species, please write to:

Write-On Target
VDGIF - Information Desk
P.O. Box 11104
Richmond, VA 23230-1104

Bald Eagles are beginning to build their nests. Where can I go to watch them?

Virginia is blessed with bald eagles. During the winter, we have northern eagles wintering over and during the summer, southern eagles

migrate up to their summer areas. Virginia's bald eagles do not tend to migrate or only migrate short distances.

Virginia's bald eagles begin to rebuild nesting sites in late January through February. During this period, you need to be very careful not to disturb them. I have been advised to stay at least a quarter mile from their nesting site, as human presence will disturb them. They will tend to watch the invading humans instead of building their nests. As such, we normally do not give out nesting sites.

Caledon State Natural Area has trails that pass near eagle nests. They close these trails during this time so that the eagles will not be disturbed.

The Department has a *Wildlife Watching Guide* that is available for free. Please call (804) 367-9369 and we will be happy to send you a copy.

Capital Sport Fishing, Travel & Outdoor Show

If the wintertime blues have got you down, and you need a good pick me up, then plan to attend the 2000 Capital Sport Fishing, Travel & Outdoor Show in Chantilly, Virginia February 17-20. Over 450 exhibitors will have everything for hunting, fishing, boating, adventure sports, and wildlife watching on display, along with educational seminars on the outdoors. Look for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries booth where you can get your new 2000 fishing license, and have a chance to talk with staff experts about Virginia's wildlife resources.

If you would like more information call: 703/802-0066. □

Prescribed Burning Benefits Wildlife

Beginning February 15 through April 30, it is illegal to have an open-air fire before 4:00 p.m. in most urban and rural areas of Virginia.

This is also the time of the year when you need to plan and prepare your habitat for prescribed burning. Prescribed burning helps to reduce overgrown habitat to a state of early-succession, which benefits species like bobwhite quail, and helps to return nutrients to the soil by removing old logs and debris.

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries offers prescribed burning workshops for interested landowners who would like to learn how to better manage their property for wildlife. Landowners are encouraged to check into their local and county ordinances with regard to burning. For more information on classes call (804) 367-3706. □



New State Record Catfish

The State Record Fish Committee at the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries announced that Hugh Self, of Powhatan, is now the proud holder of a new state record for blue catfish. The official weight pushed the scales to 71 pounds 12 ounces and measured 48 1/4 inches long, with a girth of 34 inches. This breaks the old record, of 67 1/2 pounds set by David W. Christian on May 11, 1999.

Self caught the giant catfish on November 19 from the James River near Dutch Gap using cut shad. Game Warden Milt D. Robinson and Assistant Fish Division Director, Fred Leckie, witnessed and verified the weighing. After posing for a few quick pictures, Self released his state record catch back into the James River alive. □



On The Water

by Jim Crosby, Region 4 Boating Education Coordinator

Fill'er Up!

"Fill'er Up," is one of the most potentially dangerous statements a recreational boater can make from two different points of view. One cup of vaporized gasoline has the explosive power of several sticks of dynamite, and that makes it the most dangerous element the recreational boater has to deal with; not to mention the stiff fines imposed upon polluters.

With very few exceptions, all recreational boats operate on gasoline, and use oil and grease to ease the way. Aside from the explosive power of gasoline, all petroleum products have tremendous pollution potential due to their toxic effect on marine plants and animals. You don't swim in water polluted with petroleum products, and neither do fish, and survive.

Before I accept a ride on someone else's boat, I want to inspect the bilge. The bilge is the environmental barometer for boaters. A bilge that you could sit, slumber, or eat in is the best indicator you can use to identify a conscientious, conservative, and careful boater with whom you would be willing to share your future life on this planet.

Most boat explosions are closely related to refueling. Gasoline vapors ignited by a spark is the threat. Transferring gasoline from one place to another, such as the gasoline dock's fuel storage tanks to the gas tank on your boat, mixes air with the gasoline which vaporizes it. It's the

vapor that is dangerous and not the liquid. My dad used to drown a cigarette in a vat of gasoline to demonstrate. Of course, he always cautioned not to hold the cigarette over the fumes if you valued your life. The fumes, or vapor, is heavier than air and sinks to the lowest collection basin it encounters. On your boat that would be the bilge.



©Dwight Dyke

Liquid flowing through a pipe creates static electricity just as when you slide across your fabric car seat and touch the door knob. To avoid this particular hazard, you must keep the fill nozzle in metal-to-metal contact with your boat's filler pipe. Can you trust the summer help kid on the fuel dock has this knowledge? Thank you very much, but I would rather do it myself after I ask everyone onboard to step ashore for a stretch break.

When refueling your boat, I suggest you know the capacity of your tank and approximately how much fuel you have left in there so you can

monitor the fueling carefully. If the only answer is to top off, place an absorbent cloth, or catch basin, under your overflow spout and do not use the auto cut-off latch on the filler nozzle. You just can't trust them and it only takes a cup, or less of gasoline, spread on the water under the fuel dock to blow you, and all present into the next world; and failing that, to

poison untold numbers of marine plant and animal life in the water.

Back to the bilge consideration. What is your bilge pump exhausting into the water? Well maintained engines do not drip, leak, or sling petroleum products. If you maintain a clean bilge, you can pick up signs of future trouble by what you find there between cleaning sessions.

All bilge collect water from spray, rain, or—heaven forbid—leaks. To cope with this by keeping the volume within tolerable levels, most have a bilge pump to exhaust the excess overboard. A bilge pump spouting water overboard is yet another caution and raises questions. How much, and what, am I pumping overboard. Do I have a dangerous leak? Am I polluting the water? Should I head in?

Aside from any real danger of sinking, it's illegal to discharge oily bilge water into our waterways. You are not only polluting the water you must have to enjoy your sport, you are risking a huge fine, as well.

Whose bilge are you going to inspect before your next boating adventure? □



Naturally Wild



story and illustration by Spike Knuth

The Oldsquaw

The oldsquaw is referred to as a "sea duck" along with scoters and eiders—ducks that associate mainly along or in the oceans. These hardy birds breed and often remain in the far north, in Arctic waters that remain open.

It is often called the long-tailed duck because of its tail, which is similar to that of the pintail. Another common nickname is "noisy duck" because of its noisy "ow-ow-owlee" call. Other names are "south-southerly," "cockawee," "old Molly," "winter duck," and "hound." Its call has been likened to a distant pack of baying hounds.

Oldsquaws are active ducks on the water as they feed. In winter the male is mostly white with a black lower chest, back markings, and tail; brownish-black wings and a gray, black and brown facial patch. In summer, his plumage changes completely to almost all black underparts and head with a white face patch! The winter female is more brownish gray and less white. Both are short-necked with short bills. They measure 16 to 23 inches, the male being larger.

Oldsquaws fly high in large flocks, flying in irregular formations while in migration, or single file, and low over the water when moving about its feeding grounds. In flight, they do a lot of twisting and turning, making wide sweeping arcs. From on high they may come down at great speed very suddenly, leveling off just above the surface of the water.

They feed by diving, feeding side by side, diving one at a time until they are all underwater, then sud-

denly popping up almost in unison. They feed along tidal rips, shoals, and often in the surf, feeding on marine insects, crustaceans, and mollusks. A good place to view them if they are around, is off the first island of the Bay Bridge-Tunnel at the rip-rapping that extends out into the Thimble Shoals Channel. Most dives are 8 to 25 feet, but they can easily dive over 100 feet and have been caught in fishing nets at 200 feet!


Oldsquaws breed on the Arctic coasts of both hemispheres, an area called the circumpolar belt, which includes North America, Greenland, Iceland, northern Europe, and Asia. They nest in the low grasses around shallow ponds, near low-

growing shrubs or clumps of grasses, and close to open water.

The young are flying by late-August and early-September, and southerly movements begin at that time. They gather in large, swarming flocks on the Arctic coasts. Many actually winter in the Arctic waters that remain open, such as southern Greenland, and there are always some wintering in the fresh water of the Great Lakes. But many come south to the Atlantic Coast and Chesapeake Bay.

Here in Virginia, in addition to the Bay Bridge-Tunnel, look for them in the surf off of Assateague and Back Bay, the tidal creek mouths of Northern Neck and I've seen an occasional bird on Smith Mountain Lake. □





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